

## THE QUR'ANIC BASES OF SOCIOLOGY

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The Qur'an is the book of guidance revealed by Allah (swt), the Lord of the universe, to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in the best interests and for the out-and-out wellbeing of humankind (*hudan lil'-nas*). It is full of wisdom (*hikmah*), gives meaning to human life and makes it a splendour. It is the direct communication and a heart-to-heart talk between God and humans. It is, in fact, the message of Allah (swt) in His own words and style and with His own eloquence and emphasis to human beings so that they may lead a peaceful, comfortable, meaningful and dignified life on Earth. It addresses human beings and impresses upon them to comprehend reality, differentiate between good and bad, right and wrong, virtue and sin and choose those things that are most beneficial for them and society at large. This is wisdom and prudence. If one lives in this world, and acts according to it, one will get its fruits. Otherwise, one has to face destruction. Humans are the most significant creations of Allah (swt) and are dear and near to Him. As such, He has allocated certain responsibilities to them which they have to discharge efficiently with all sincerity and devotion. For this purpose, Allah (swt) from time to time reminded humans of their duties, showed them the right path along which they have to proceed and guided them how to operate in this world. The Qur'an is the last, final, clear and comprehensible, impressive and awe-inspiring guidance and message of Allah (swt) to humankind, His most astonishing and superior creation so that they may think over it and communicate it to their fellow beings. The Qur'an says: "And We have sent down unto thee (also) the Message; that thou mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them and that they may give thought" (Qur'an, 16:44).

The Qur'an presents an exposition of certain universal truths that play a determinant role in human life, bringing to light the fundamental bases on which humans can form groups, develop collectivities and create social life. It lays down the cardinal principles according to which humans interact with each other, build the structure of social relationships, make social arrangements, determine the nature of social action and ultimately shape their operation for the attainment of the highest good. These issues and matters are the subjects of sociological investigation and have been dealt with from different perspectives. The study of these issues in the light of the Qur'anic exposition helps us to understand the nature of human relations and the collectivity which they form for their possible survival. It, furthermore, gives us an insight to reconstruct society in such a way that, on one hand, it develops human potentialities and enables them to attain perfection and, on the other, it makes the earth a place worth living in with peace, harmony, happiness and contentment. Besides, it provides a theoretical framework, a solid conceptual ground, and a research impetus to further sociological studies on a new premise.

The Qur'an points out certain doctrinal principles that provide the bases of human action in this world. These universal truths determine the meaning of human survival and the nature of their struggle for it. It serves as the infrastructure on which the premises of human life come into being. These are the concepts of the 'Reality' of the world, humans, the relations among them and, as a result, the nature of social interaction and social life as well. These constitute the foundation on which sociological imagination can develop and sociological studies can be conducted.

### **View of Reality**

The foremost principle that the Qur'an enunciates is the view of the 'Ultimate Reality' which is the force behind the existence and working of the whole universe and every object in it, both animate and inanimate. The Absolute Reality, characterized as '*al-Haqq*', is none other than God identified in most comprehensive term as Allah by the Qur'an. He, according to the Qur'anic description, is 'the sole self-subsisting, all-pervading, eternal and Absolute Reality' (Qur'an, 2:115; 20:111; 31:31). He is omnipresent and omnipotent and 'immanent both in the souls (*anfus*) and the spatio-temporal order (*afaq*)'. He has innumerable attributes, unlimited power, cannot be described in words, and as such, is beyond human comprehension. He is transcendent because He is beyond the limitations of time and space and sense-content. As a matter of fact, He cannot be seen and experienced by finite human beings. In a nutshell, He can do anything which He wants, He is the Lord of all the worlds and of all mysteries and has power over all things (Qur'an, 1:2; 16:77; 48: 4, 7). He is the Creative Reality which gives meaning and life to everything and makes them exist. He provides them with all the requirements necessary for their existence, sustenance and maintenance. This is the attribute of '*Rabubiyah*', Divine Prudence which He alone possesses and discharges in the most adequate way and with great acumen. He, in this aspect, furnishes everything with all that its nature demands for its existence in every situation. This is the reason that the Qur'an characterizes Him as '*Rabb*' or Nourisher not of a particular community but of all humankind and of everything that exists in this world. Related with this, the other discernable attribute is that He, with all His glory, is the all-merciful as He bestows bounties upon His creatures, provides their necessities and helps them to exist. The two aspects of the providence and mercifulness of God give rise to the third important aspect of divinity, that is, the relation between God and humans. This relationship is one of served and servant, creator and creation and serves as the cornerstone of human life, a human's relations with his fellow beings as well as with other objects of the world. This indicates the centrality of God in the entire system of existence.

### **The World**

The universe and things that lie between the heavens and the earth are created by God, controlled and guided by him. He initiated the process of creation and adds to the creation according to His will. When He decides to create anything it comes into being by His sheer command (Qur'an, 2:117; 3:47). The uniqueness of His creation is that He does not require any cause or material to create but only His command is sufficient to create anything because He is the cause of all causes. He is all and all possessor and commander of the universe. He

does not leave His creatures alone but sustains and maintains them so that they may work as He wishes and serve the purpose of their creation. He has ordained certain principles and established a pattern according to which all objects work and contribute to the smooth functioning of the larger system which we call the universe. The whole universe and all of its objects are created with a purpose and not for 'an ideal sport'. Every object serves a certain purpose and thus plays its role in the maintenance and continuation of the universe. All objects are the parts of the grand system and can best be understood in the context of the purpose and function of that system. The universe and all of its objects work according to His plan and command and are under His full control and subservience. They completely surrender to His will, obey His commands and are thus characterized as Muslims by the Qur'an. Only human beings have been given freedom of choice. They have been endowed with an advanced faculty of understanding to comprehend reality. Furthermore, they have been given guidance, and shown the right path to follow. If they pay heed to and comply with the guidance given to them, they will benefit. Otherwise, they have to face the consequences. Now they have to decide what way and what path they have to choose to live in this world. The universe is a well-integrated and well-knitted system where all parts are related and dependent on each other. The working of one affects the working of the others. Everything is contingent upon God, gets strength from Him and works according to the laws engrained by Him. Thus, the world and its parts cannot be understood in the correct way without that upon which they are contingent.

### **Human Beings**

Humans are the best creation of Allah (swt), created in the best form and in 'due proportion' endowed with superior qualities so that they may carry the torch of the Divine mission to every nook and cranny, establish them on earth and lead life according to them. Allah (swt), further, has exalted the position of humans by appointing them as His vicegerents on earth. As such, the duty of human beings is to implement His commands and establish the Divine system characterized as *Din* on earth. *Din* is a system of life based on devotion to God and virtuous living. It is 'the way of conformity or surrender to the laws of life fixed by God'. It is a way of life which enables humans to live together in mutual love and affection, binding them into a fraternity and inspiring them to collectively submit to the will of the Lord. It is genuinely true guidance, one and the same which has been conveyed to every people and community and enjoined on previous prophets Noah, Abraham and Moses [(peace be on them) Qur'an, 42:13]. The important position of humans in the Islamic doctrine is of '*ubudiyah*'. This connotes that they are the servants of Allah (swt), the Nourisher and Sustainer of all the worlds. It is the pride for human beings that they enter into servitude to Allah (swt) the Supreme Power, the Lord of the universe. This is, in fact, the true identity of human beings which they have to demonstrate by their complete surrender to His will and order and manifest it in their every action and in all aspects of their lives.

Humans have a special task to perform in this world. They have been given knowledge, ability and all impetus to understand the truth, strive to follow and embrace goodness and perform the task which has been assigned to them. If they proceed in that direction, soon the result will appear, but in case they neglect the signs given by God, pay heed to their own

desires and follow them, they will face the wrath of God. Following one's own desires in comparison to God's will and dictates is, in Qur'anic terms, to 'gravitate down to the earth' which is subject to condemnation. However, it is the domain of humans to choose the right or wrong path for leading their lives on the earth but they will be accountable for their choice and acts before God.

## **Human Operations**

Human operations are the endeavour which humans undertake to exist in this world in a distinct way and for a distinct purpose. They are the process and series of actions which humans perform during their stay in the material world for the attainment of the highest good as well as for leading a comfortable, meaningful and dignified life. It is to work in a particular way and for a particular purpose. The purpose and the method of work give a new dimension, a new form and pattern to humans' actions and affect their position in the social setting. The Qur'anic expositions of universal truths and the Divine guidance determine the nature of human operations in this world, mould human actions as well as their interaction with animate and inanimate objects and develop a social arrangement based on ideology rather than ethnic or other considerations that are subordinate to the former one. This provides a new incentive to sociologists to study society anew. Human operations in the Qur'anic framework take place and work under certain broad principles:

1. An individual's life is based on the 'Faith' that is the bedrock of all their activities. They should live on and die in the state of faith that is self-surrender to God. They should be steadfast in their faith and profess it with full vigour. The epitome of unwavering faith in Allah (swt) and His attributes is the 'People of the Cave'. Individuals' days and nights should be spent in acting on faith and their lives should be moulded accordingly. All the Prophets conveyed the same message and impressed upon their people that it is the only true way of life which brings peace and contentment. All other than this are false and those who seek it will be losers. The Prophets Abraham and Jacob (peace and blessings be upon them) said to their heirs; O my sons! Allah has chosen for you the true religion, then die not except in the faith of Islam (Qur'an, 2:132).
2. Individuals must accept and confirm the hallmarks of '*Rububiyah*', the providence, by their thoughts and actions. Their personalities, behaviour and all aspects of their lives must show the greatness of Allah (swt). They should manifest the sovereignty and suzerainty of Allah (swt) in their way of living and show some of His basic attributes by their actions. Allah (swt) is the lone supreme power and alone should be worshipped. Humans are His servants and must completely submit to His will and order. Since He is alone the Nourisher and the Provider of the means of sustenance to every living being, small or big, grand or trivial, humans must depend upon Him, seek His help and mercy and obtain subsistence according to the way prescribed by Him.
3. An individual's entire life is an act of worship. Worship, according to the Qur'an, is not only limited to prayer, rituals and rites but it is a comprehensive concept and

encompasses the whole life of believers. It refers to the acts done to seek the pleasure of Allah (swt) and obtain His favour. It is, thus, the obedience to Allah (swt), to His commands, laws and system as well as the precepts of the Prophet. The Qur'an explains worship in clear terms: Say (O Prophet): Verily, my prayer, my sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, the Lord of the worlds. He has no partner. And of this I have been commanded, and I am the first of Muslims (Quran, 6: 162-163). This indicates that human actions are initiated, planned and performed to please Allah (swt) and not to please one's ego and satisfy one's desires.

4. Humans should satisfy their urges and needs in a proper and dignified way. Too much involvement in the gratification of human urges is not at all encouraged because it leads humans astray from their basic role and indulges them in undesirable acts. Moreover, the satisfaction of needs in the Islamic theoretical framework is considered as means and not an end. They should be performed in such a way and to such an extent that facilitate the attainment of the final purpose of life.
5. All humans are equal. They are the progeny of the same father and mother. They should be treated on an equal footing. They should be respected, their rights should be protected and their dignity should be maintained. No one is allowed to humiliate them, call them bad names, usurp their property, exploit and suppress them. They should be treated with sympathy and love.
6. Every human being should do justice to himself/herself, his/ her fellow beings and society at large. Justice is the attribute of God and He commands that justice and good be done. Justice should not be done only to one community but should be extended to everyone because He is the cherisher of everyone and makes His bounties available to everyone. The Qur'an directs human beings to practise justice, do good and forbid evil, obscenity and oppression.
7. Individuals should negate polytheism, racism, superstition, ritualism and injustice by their thoughts and actions. As far as possible, they should create resistance against these forces because they are injurious and degrade humanity.

### **Social Interaction**

Human beings, in order to operate in the world, come into contact with their fellow beings. They sometimes seek the cooperation of others and sometimes extend their cooperation to others. The process of acting amidst the plurality of individuals and impacting each other is social interaction. Generally, it takes place in the expectation of getting some benefit from the acting individuals or the situation. Sometimes people interact with others and participate in the situation to fulfil their own interests and ambitions. It is shaped by the principle of 'give and take'. In Islamic doctrine, interaction does not take place along the lines of material gain or satisfaction of one's ego or fulfilment of one's interests. It is based on the accomplishment

of human obligation to God. The foremost position of humans is that of a servant of God and in this capacity they have to harmonize their relations with the Lord by giving complete obedience to His commands and by following the path which He prescribed for them. The cardinal principle is that a human's relations with his fellow beings depend on his relations with his creator. As such, social interaction is not based on material gain or loss but on rights and duties prescribed by God as well as on humans' role as the vicegerents of God on the earth. Humans have to operate not just to meet the condition of survival but to seek the pleasure of God. Meeting the conditions of survival is a means to a certain end and it should be directed to the final purpose of life. So, that being so, social interaction, the actions and operations of the servants of God in this world are aimed solely at pleasing God and all their activities in all spheres of life are directed towards that goal.

### **Social Life**

Social life is the arena where individuals carry out their mission, translate it into action and accomplish their obligation to God, their fellow beings and to society. It is a social arrangement which provides conditions conducive to bringing to fruition human obligations. It creates a distinct setting, an order that reflects the suzerainty and ascendancy of God and gives priority and preferences to His command. It sets up a state of servitude to Allah (swt) and a collectivity of His servants who struggle to accomplish the Divine mission and establish Divine order on the earth. It determines the nature of human interaction and the structure of human relationships. It lays down the fundamental bases on which humans are organized into a well-integrated whole and developed into an ideological community to carry the message of God to every corner of the world.